

# Venus And Flying Saucers

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**THE** recent outbreak of flying saucer reports, in Western Australia and on the other side of the world, has many people half convinced that the objects are not man-made but are from outer space.

It seems almost certain that they are right.

Common features of most of the sightings are that the object is in the west, it is low on the horizon, changes position, size and colour, and disappears suddenly. The observer is usually unable to estimate its distance, and is often terrified, which does not help the accuracy of any estimate which may be made. (The reporting of oil drilling rigs and tractors as unidentified flying objects show to what extent imagination can affect judgment in some circumstances.)

## Low In Sky

Under favourable meteorological conditions, when Venus is low in the sky it sometimes changes colour, seems to move about, and in general performs all of the antics mentioned in most of the sightings during the past few months. It seems more than a coincidence that the recent sightings occurred almost invariably in the west, low on the horizon, and at the time when Venus was setting. There seems to be little doubt that this is the object from outer space which is responsible for the great majority of them.

Some features of one of the most interesting reports (that of Mr Kukla, south-east of Carnarvon) could not be completely explained in this way, as the u.f.o. was said to have circled his car after diving at him at high speed. This, however, could have been explained by the presence of a meteorological balloon in that area and winds at the time were such that any of those released from Carnarvon in the day or so before could have been there.

After release, these balloons usually ascend till they burst, but very occasionally one will leak and descend. As it rises, it increases in size due to the reduction in air pressure with height; any small hole in the fabric is enlarged and gas will escape faster as it ascends. Conversely, any aperture from which gas is escap-

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ing becomes smaller as the balloon descends and the loss of gas decreases as it nears the earth.

It would be possible for such a balloon to fall through most of the atmosphere, but to cease falling and float for some time in the denser air of the inversion layer which develops during the night near the earth's surface. In these circumstances most of the effects observed would be explainable.

The balloon would wander about in the light surface winds and change in altitude with even the slightest vertical movement of local air currents. It would finally depart in a westerly direction as the gradient wind was east-north-east in the area at that time.

The polished metal surface of the radar target is an excellent reflector of light, and as it swings about under the balloon it emits flashes of light whenever one of its reflecting surfaces is in a favourable position with regard to the sun, moon or terrestrial light sources. The light is perhaps not green, but more of a bright steel colour, and when reflecting the headlights of a car the flashes are plainly visible at 500 yards and probably at 1,000 yards.

The reflector consists of three planes, each at right angles to the other two, and may explain the right-angled lines shown beneath the object illustrated in the Press, in the area from which the brightest light was said to have come.

The diving towards the car might well be explained by the rapid movement of the car towards an object which was much closer than previously thought; and the colour change which took place during this time is exactly what takes place with a red balloon lit by the slightly yellowish beam of car headlights at night. In testing this with the balloon suspended just above car height the effect of the rapid change in size and colour in the last few yards was quite frightening, and on one occasion the testing car automatically swerved away as the balloon appeared to be coming through the wind-screen.

The couple who saw the next u.f.o. north of Carnarvon found it difficult to estimate its distance. They could not, therefore,

form a reliable estimate of the "terrific speed" with which it approached them, and for the same reason would be unable to determine whether its distance from the earth's surface was 100 feet, 100 miles or 100 million miles. Though it was said to be below the skyline, the estimated height of 100 feet at a distance of half a mile would put it well above the skyline in that area, at an elevation of about four times that of the Darling Range when seen from Perth. Venus was setting in the west about the time of this incident.

When driving at night many people have noticed the moon pacing them through the trees and changing position as the road winds about.

The next sighting on the Nullarbor was apparently of this type, with Venus low on the horizon as the car travelled westwards along a straight road. Then as it turned south it apparently overtook Venus and passed it, finally leaving it behind as it set. An almost exact duplicate of the shape illustrated in the Press at the time can be found in the "Marine Observer" of January, 1965, in which a ship's officer reports a similar distortion of the sun when setting.

## Hard To Judge

This difficulty of estimating size and distance at night is well illustrated by the action of an American cruiser which, while en route from Pearl Harbour to Australia, fired 150 rounds at Venus in an attempt to shoot it down. The same difficulty resulted in a light falling from a balloon at low altitude being reported as a u.f.o. departing at fantastic speed and disappearing over the horizon in a few seconds.

It might be mentioned that outbreaks of sightings like this year's could probably be forecast by an astronomer, with a reasonable chance of success. They will occur when Venus sets after dark, while plenty of people are still about to see it.

They are less likely to be reported when it rises in the early morning as fewer people will see it, and it will not disappear below the horizon. While it sets or rises during the daylight hours it will not usually be noticed. The right conditions occur comparatively infrequently, but when they do, they occur all round the world, giving rise to worldwide u.f.o. sightings.